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Doing What You Love in the Age of Mass Debt

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ABSTRACT This paper examines the relationship between student debt and the changing terrain of work in U.S. culture, while attending to how these shifts mark a specifically gendered, racialized phenomenon. Drawing on the AAUW's 2017 report on student debt, this paper examines the figure of the fashion intern in order to think about how the gender and racial inequities in student debt collude with what Angela McRobbie terms 'the feminization of work' to effect a gendered, racialized form of indebtedness. I assert that the 'do what you love' ethos described by Miya Tokumitsu contributes to the proliferation of feminized work in the culture industries, such as fashion, and the perpetuation of racial exclusivity within the industry.

In 2017, education debt in the U.S. reached \$1.4 trillion dollars.¹ While this exorbitant sum is shared among 44 million borrowers, it is not shared equally. Examining data from a 2016 study produced by the U.S. Department of Education, the American Association of University Women (hereafter, AAUW) report that while 2007–08 male college graduates were able to secure full-time employment to pay off their student loans, their female counterparts were not.² The report states: "Between 2009 and 2012, men who graduated in the 2007–08 school year paid off an average of 44% of their student debt, while women in that group managed to pay off only 33% of their student debt."³ This discrepancy is troubling given that more women, 53%, compared with 39% of their male counterparts, are putting more of their salaries towards student debt repayment, which means that these women are "less able to save for retirement, buy a car, or invest in a home."⁴ The AAUW attributes this discrepancy to the gender pay gap, and emphasizes that the inability to pay back student debt is worst for Latinas (who had paid back 3 percent at the time of the study) and African-American women (9 percent), while white women (37 percent) and Asian-American women (61 percent) were considerably higher, albeit still trailing their male counterparts.⁵

As Maurizio Lazzarato and Andrew Ross argue, debt has become a significant social force, shaping the terms with which individuals understand themselves and society.⁶ At the same time, Lazzarato, Ross, and Michael Hardt assert that waged work has become increasingly precarious and immaterial in nature.⁷ Building on this scholarship, this paper examines the relationship between student debt and the changing terrain of work in U.S. culture, while attending to how these shifts mark a specifically gendered, racialized phenomenon. While Lazzarato, Ross, and Hardt provide compelling arguments regarding the nature of work and debt in contemporary capitalism, they do not address how the proliferation of immaterial labor marks what Angela McRobbie describes as the "feminization" of the labor force. As McRobbie observes, increasing precarity and immateriality dovetail with the "feminization of work . . . the expansion of possibilities for women's employment across many countries and particularly in the affluent countries where there had been a strong feminist movement in the 1960s."⁸ As McRobbie argues, "The nature of work in a post-Fordist economy favored the large skill pool and the

flexibility of the female workforce,” leading to a growth in female workers within the creative industries marked by precarity and immateriality, such as fashion.⁹ In this way, both the demographics of the labor force as well as the labor itself became feminized, because the very work becoming “increasingly precarious, and under compensated” was, and is, explicitly “reliant on ‘soft’ skills such as communication, affect and cognition.”¹⁰ In other words, the feminization of work also entails the proliferation of those skills presumed “natural” to female persons (e.g., service, nurturance, and communication), but also long associated with the pink collar professions.¹¹ However, this is not to assert a gender essentialism, but rather to acknowledge how modes of laboring historically associated with women (e.g., emotional, service-oriented, boundary-less, and unwaged) now characterize the labor of many immaterial workers. As Christina Morini argues, “in cognitive capitalism precariousness, mobility, and fragmentation become constituent elements of the work of all persons irrespective of gender. The model advanced is pliable, hyper-flexible, and in this sense, it draws on the baggage of female experience.”¹² Thus, to discuss the feminization of work is to acknowledge that in the post-Fordist era, not only are women participating in fields like the culture industries at an unprecedented rate, but the immaterial labor they undertake is feminizing in that it re-enforces a gender structure wherein woman-identified persons are disadvantaged via precarious employment. The significance of gender to understanding immateriality and student debt is especially worthy of consideration then because woman-identified persons are further in debt, are less likely to secure the kind of employment after graduation to pay it back, and (as I discuss below) are over-represented in those labor forms that remain very low-waged, if waged at all.¹³

At the same time, race also occupies a central role in understanding the gendered machinations of student indebtedness. As the figures regarding student indebtedness above highlight, debt repayment is most difficult for Latinas and African-American women, while it remains less so for white and Asian-American women. Thus, to speak of gendered indebtedness is to speak of racialized, gendered indebtedness, as the persons most impacted by student debt are women of color. This aspect of student indebtedness is not unrelated to the feminization of work. As Minh-Ha Pham outlines in her discussion of the invisible labors of Asian fashion superbloggers, “the racialization of women’s work has also *benefitted* white women” (emphasis added).¹⁴ As Evelyn Nakano Glenn argues, the nineteenth-century “cult of domesticity” that structured gender relations depended on the invisible domestic labors of women (and men) of color, effectively establishing a racial stratification within the realm of women’s work.¹⁵ Thus, while the feminization of work “draws on the baggage of female experience,” it necessarily draws on the historical realities of women’s work that have produced racial stratifications among women, of which white women have benefitted. The historical legacies of these stratifications continue in numerous forms of gendered, racialized labors that effectively reproduce a racial hierarchy wherein economically privileged, white women consume and benefit from the labors of women of color.¹⁶ I examine the figure of the fashion intern because she illustrates how such racial stratifications among women are reproduced and intensified via student indebtedness. Additionally, as I outline below, the fashion intern is a particularly apt example because she highlights how racial stratifications within culture industries such as fashion are perpetuated.

Examining this phenomenon, I ask how the ideological imperative to ‘do what you love’ contributes to the gendered workings of indebtedness. “Do what you love, and love what you do” is often presented as a form of spiritual guidance. For instance, in one of the more famous pronouncements of the “do what you love” ethos, in his 2005 Stanford graduation address, the late Steve Jobs advised graduating students “to find what you love” because, “the only way to do great work is to love what you do.”¹⁷ As a life ethos, “do what you love”

suggests that exploitation is something that one can opt out of, because if one loves their work, then not only are they not exploited, but they are not working. In a 2014 *Jacobin* magazine article shared over 65,000 times on social media (and published as a book in 2015), author Miya Tokumitsu argues that the discourse of “do what you love” bears considerable advantages to capitalism, while hurting workers everywhere. As Tokumitsu asserts, “According to this way of thinking, labor is not something one does for compensation, but an act of self-love.”¹⁸ In this analysis, doing what one loves ensures spiritual fulfillment, albeit with adequate benefits and compensation perceived as incidentals, rather than necessities for survival.

Taken in the context of mass student debt, I pursue the following questions: What kinds of work are made possible, or impossible through the imperative to “do what one loves”? How does the imperative to “do what you love” intensify inequity along economic, racial, and gendered lines, especially within the context of mass debt? And, more specifically, how might the directive to “love” one’s work, to warrant work null through “love,” mark a particularly gendered manifestation of indebtedness? Pursuing these questions, I examine the figure of the fashion intern, whose gendered, culturally unrecognizable labor is a part of the broader proliferation of precarious labor forms marked by “instability, the absence of legal contracts (of employment abiding by legal standards) lack of protection and social benefits, lack of collective agreement of employment, and low wages” that permeate and characterize most of the culture industries in the current moment.¹⁹ The fashion intern is one of the most iconic yet culturally unrecognizable fashion workers, and I assert that this misrecognition is because the fashion intern “loves” what she does, and thus does not work. I examine the fashion intern in order to think about how the gender and racial inequities evident in student debt collude with the feminization of cultural work, effecting a gendered, racialized form of indebtedness.

Examining the figure of the fashion intern then is an attempt to illustrate two important aspects crucial to understanding the structure of student debt and immaterial labor in the current moment. The first concerns the way in which immaterial labor, particularly that within the culture industries like fashion, is increasingly gendered feminine. This gendering occurs through the feminization of work that entails an increase in woman-identified persons undertaking these labors, but also the way in which this labor is characterized by its flexibility, adaptability, emotion work, and lack of a wage. The figure of the fashion intern is exemplary in this regard, as her labor, despite being crucial to the operations of fashion, remains culturally unrecognizable and unwaged. The second aspect concerns how the combination of mass student indebtedness and unpaid internships effectively prohibits women of color specifically, and indebted students generally, from entering fields within the culture industries such as fashion. As a 2012 study undertaken by *The Chronicle of Higher Ed* illustrates, internships remain the primary route with which recent graduates and/or new workers gain entry to their desired professions.²⁰ Internships throughout the culture industries, however, tend to be unpaid, demanding work that is economically prohibitive for any person carrying a significant debt load. Examining the figure of the fashion intern demonstrates how labor that—for all intents and purposes—exploits its workers and is compelled for free, nonetheless simultaneously acts as a means by which to bar the most economically vulnerable and historically underrepresented groups in these very industries. Thus, while the figure of the fashion intern highlights the feminization of immaterial work, she also exemplifies the ways in which “the categories of free labor and the various forms of subjugated labor—including slave labor, indentured labor, and sweated labor—are economic expressions of racial and gendered logics.”²¹ Examining the figure of the fashion intern, then, is a means with which to articulate both the racial and gendered logics that underpin her exploitation but also

the ways in which the racial inequities that permeate the fashion industry are perpetuated.

The paper is divided into four sections. In the first section, “The Politics of Student Debt,” I return to the AAUW’s report on student debt in order to represent how student debt disproportionately impacts women, and women of color specifically. I then situate this research alongside scholarship on debt to clarify how the AAUW’s research confirms many of the theories present in the literature. In the next section, “Immaterial Labor and Doing What You Love,” I trace how the shift to a precarious, knowledge economy entails a reorientation to work, and argue that the ethos of “do what you love” fulfills this reorientation. As I argue below, “do what you love” provides the ideological underpinnings necessary to prolonged precarious employment, and justifies the social exclusions for which industries such as fashion are infamously known. Discussing student debt and immaterial labor together I aim to show how an ethos of “do what you love” is both necessary to sustaining a precarious, immaterial economy undergirded by debt, but also, bears a distinctly gendered aspect. In the next section, “Fashion Interns,” I examine the figure of the fashion intern, whose iconicity in U.S. media overshadows her unwaged, immaterial labor. In this section I outline how the unwaged labor of interns constitutes a large swath of necessary labor throughout the culture industries, and is compelled through the ideology of “do what you love.” After my discussion of intern labor, I conclude with some final remarks concerning student debt, immaterial labor and “doing what you love,” within the context of the fashion industry.

The Politics of Student Debt

As the AAUW reports, women possess “nearly two-thirds of the outstanding student debt in the US.”²² On the surface, this imbalance along gender lines reflects the changes in student population in higher education over the last sixty years. Women now earn more than half (57 percent) of bachelor’s degrees in the U.S., and between 1976 and 2014 the total number of undergraduate students identifying as not-white “more than doubled from 16 percent to 42 percent.”²³ However, these shifts in student population cannot account for the reality of student debt inequity. While the median household income has stagnated since 1976, the “median cost of college attendance has more than doubled since then.”²⁴ This soaring cost of college attendance has unequally impacted women; women take on an average of 44 percent of debt for undergraduate education, compared to 39 percent for men.²⁵ As the AAUW notes, this discrepancy between debt load is exacerbated by the gender pay gap, because: “Women working full time with college degrees make 26 percent less than their male counterparts,” which means less money to put towards repayment of student loans.²⁶

For women of color, the rising cost of college attendance and gender pay gap is most severe. As noted in the AAUW report, wealth in the US is distributed along racial lines, as white and Asian families tend to have much higher incomes and accrued familial wealth than black or Latino families.²⁷ These discrepancies in total accrued wealth means that black and Latino students have less economic support from family members, and are more likely to cover the total costs of their education as individuals. These differences are reflected in the AAUW’s research: “[T]he typical black woman who graduated with a bachelor’s degree in 2011–12 did so with about \$29,000 in student loans while black men averaged \$25,000 . . . Asian graduates had the lowest debt, averaging about \$11,000 in debt at graduation.”²⁸ While black students—regardless of gender—share the bulk of student debt, it is black women who comprise the most indebted on average.²⁹ As the AAUW states, “Women—especially women of color—are most likely to experience difficulties, 34 percent of all women and 57 percent of black women who were repaying

student loans report[ed] that they had been unable to meet essential expenses within the last year.”³⁰

While the gains in diversity in higher education are positive outcomes of the legislative policies and political movements of the previous century, in order to be truly transformative, they must entail actual gains post-graduation. The inability to meet basic needs *because* one has obtained an advanced degree does not reflect an actual step towards equity in higher education; particularly because it is the very students held up as proof of change (i.e., students of color, women, first-generation students, women of color) who are struggling in this endeavor. Many of these students are also nontraditional students: parents of dependent children (including single parents), students financially independent of their parents, veterans, students re-entering college after significant time away (and thus often older), part-time students, and students working full-time while enrolled are increasingly entering post-secondary institutions.³¹ Many of these nontraditional students are “disproportionately women, people of color, and first-generation college students.”³² Additionally, many of these students face hurdles to completing their college education that traditional students do not: balancing work and class schedules, finding affordable, dependent childcare, and facing interpersonal and psychological difficulties succeeding in an atmosphere catering to a much younger, childless, non-working student population. For single parents in particular (now more than 26 percent of all degree-seeking post-secondary students in the US), completing a college degree will pose the most difficulty. As the AAUW states: “Most student parents—69 percent—are low income, defined as at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level,” many of whom are also single parents (54 percent), and women (71 percent).³³ Students with dependent children are more likely to take on larger amounts of debt, and take a longer amount of time to finish their degree programs (which also tends to entail a higher debt load).³⁴ However, completing a degree program, regardless of debt load, is far better than leaving without a degree. As the AAUW report outlines, students who leave college before completing are more likely to default on their student loans, and it tends to be nontraditional students who leave college before completing their programs.³⁵

There is much to be gleaned from the AAUW’s research on student debt, but perhaps the most significant to the present study is the way in which student debt works towards reinforcing existing social hierarchies through the very promise of transforming them. In this regard, the AAUW report affirms much of the theoretical insights garnered from recent literature concerning indebtedness. In his 2012 text, *The Making of the Indebted Man*, Lazzarato argues that the debtor-creditor relationship “intensifies mechanisms of exploitation and domination at every level of society,” via a slow yet consistent tax on one’s future wages and possibilities.³⁶ As the AAUW report highlights, student debt works towards a calcification of the very structural and social inequities higher education is often touted as transcending, such as socioeconomic class. Taken as an intensifier of exploitation and inequity, student debt succeeds in this endeavor, as the students entering college with the least social and economic capital stand to leave with the most debt, and demonstrate the most difficulty repaying it. For example, this function of student debt is quite evident when considering the profitability of loan defaults, the most lucrative opportunities for creditors.³⁷ As noted above, nontraditional students are not only most likely to leave college before obtaining a degree, but as such, they are also the most likely to default.³⁸ In this way, the very students already facing barriers to degree completion (such as childcare, ageism, work-school balance, etc.) become the most profitable to the student-debt system through their failure. Thus, rather than enabling more students to obtain a degree once previously prohibitive, student debt has expanded the opportunities for exploitation and domination already in place.

In addition to the intensification of material inequities, the debt economy entails a re-figuration of subjectivity itself. As Lazzarato outlines, the predominance of the debtor-creditor relation in capitalist society comprises a material (i.e., economic indebtedness and thus a diminishment of one's overall wages) as well as a subjective component.³⁹ As Lazzarato states, "It is debt and the creditor-debtor relationship that make up the subjective paradigm of modern-day capitalism, in which 'labor' is coupled with 'work on the self', in which economic activity and the ethico-political activity of producing the subject go hand in hand."⁴⁰ It is this "work on the self" that is so significant to understanding student debt; accepted as a necessary burden in order to obtain economic and social capital, student debt differs from other kinds of debt in that it is most often framed as a means to a better life. Taking on student debt means that one is taking steps towards a better future, even if that future is compromised by rising debt load. As Ross argues, while the subjective component of student debt includes individuated kinds of violence, such as depression, suicide, and divorce, it simultaneously guides the means of protest, as publicly revealing and "owning" one's debt did during the Occupy protests of 2011.⁴¹ This personalized aspect of debt is quite evident in the AAUW study, as a significant portion of women—especially black women—reported "very high levels of stress about repayment."⁴² In sum, the subjective power of debt remains, and when taken in the context of a shifting terrain of work, bears relevance to understanding why an ethos of "do what you love" contributes to gendered indebtedness. Namely, taken in the context of mass debt and precarious employment, as a spiritual and professional ethos, "do what you love" suggests that work—with or without a wage—is simply enough. As Lazzarato argues, as both an economically material and subjectifying experience, debt reconfigures the ways in which individuals perceive waged labor. Because debt represents a deprivation on future time and money, the substance and meaning in waged work shifts, particularly for those kinds of employment necessarily entailing debt.⁴³ Speaking to this, Lazzarato states, "The dedication, the subjective motivation, and *the work on the self* preached by management since the 1980s have become an injunction to *take upon oneself* the costs of economic and financial disaster."⁴⁴ Lazzarato's comments are significant because they point towards the ways in which the injunction to take on debt intersects with ideological imperatives to better oneself, and live one's best life, regardless of actual material improvements to one's overall well-being. In the next section I suggest that the ethos of "do what you love" provides the "injunction to take upon oneself the costs of economic and financial disaster" by sustaining prolonged precarious employment.

Immaterial Labor and Doing What You Love

The concept of immaterial labor undergirds much of the recent scholarship concerning precarious labor, drawing significantly on the work of autonomous Marxism, specifically Maurizio Lazzarato (2006), Paolo Virno and Michael Hardy (2006), Michael Hardt (1999), and Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's trilogy, *Empire* (2000), *The Multitude* (2005), and *The Commonwealth* (2009). Together, these texts build on earlier work within autonomous Marxism, specifically the work of Mario Tronti (1973), whose concept of the social factory undergirds the contemporary theorization of immaterial labor.⁴⁵ In his 2006 article, Lazzarato defines immaterial labor as emergent within "a great transformation" starting in the 1970s, wherein the workforce is "mass intellectualized," inaugurating a critical shift in the nature of work, and thus the power dynamics of capital accumulation. This transformation marks a shift in labor within the Western world. The advancement of technology to the production process, the mobility of capital, and the aftermath of worker revolts of the 1960s and 1970s worked to transform the labor process so that the worker is expected to become an "active subject." As Lazzarato argues, the transformation of labor marks a stage in capitalist production wherein "a collective learning process becomes the heart of productivity, because it is no longer a matter of

finding different ways of composing or organizing already existing job functions, but of looking for new ones.”⁴⁶ In this way, aspects of life previously considered separate or distinguishable from the working day are now subsumed under it.

There is a two-part reasoning to the cause of this transformation within the autonomous school of thought. The first concerns a broader argument within the autonomous Marxist tradition that draws on Marx’s *Grundrisse*, specifically the idea of “the fragment on machines” that describes the autonomy afforded the worker’s intellect when labor is automated via technological advancement. The automation of labor processes means that labor previously requiring human, manual labor is now accomplished through technological automation, thus reducing significantly socially necessary labor time (if not eradicating it entirely). This transformation in production means that new modes of production, and thus new kinds of labor, are emergent, one form being immaterial labor. As Lazzarato asserts, “The old dichotomy between ‘mental and manual labor,’ or between ‘material and immaterial labor,’ risks failing to grasp the new nature of productive activity, which takes this transformation on board and transforms it,” because as he goes on to argue, “it is around immateriality that the quality and quantity of labor are organized.”⁴⁷

The second reason behind this transformation in work and production concerns what the autonomists refer to as “the refusal of work,” that refers to the 1960s labor protests within and beyond Italy, and the subsequent reorganization of work intended to circumvent the daily resistances and refusals to work on the part of all workers. The social unrest of the 1960s provided the terms with which a redefinition or restructuring of work became necessary so as to manage an unruly if not jaded populace of workers. This reconfiguration pivoted on the notion that work could become meaningful rather than monotonous and meaningless; it could in a sense become something more than, or perhaps entirely unlike, work. As Ross observes, from the 1970s onwards “a long series of management innovations designed to stimulate a jaded workforce” were enacted, such as “quality of work life programs” that intended “to inject some participation into decision-making and deliver more personal fulfillment to employees.”⁴⁸ These kinds of participatory initiatives, coupled with an increasing autonomy afforded to workers (made possible through both technological advancement and the restructuring of work) instilled a sense that work could be meaningful and feel good, despite the fact that these same changes marked “the onset of a long decline in job security.”⁴⁹ These causal shifts are evident in the precarious nature of immaterial labors.

Ross’s observations concerning the onset of meaningful work on the one hand, and an increasingly precarious job market on the other, are crucial to understanding the nature of immaterial labor. Immaterial labor constitutes the knowledge, social relations, and communication crucial to a large swath of commodities and services; it is as Ross observes, the “culture work” of capitalism.⁵⁰ This labor encompasses two aspects, “the ‘informational content’ of the commodity” that refers to the actual changes in the work process (i.e., the skills utilized are “increasingly skills involving cybernetics and computer control”), and the labor that produces the “cultural content of the commodity,” what Lazzarato describes as “a series of activities that are not normally recognized as ‘work.’”⁵¹ These activities include “defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and . . . public opinion”—the very cultural and creative work the interns of the culture industries aspire, and most often, perform for free.⁵² This intangibility not only makes the work highly mobile, but also it can most often occur anytime and anywhere; indeed, there is a borderlessness inherent to it, because “an idea or image comes to you not only in the office but also in the shower or in your dreams.”⁵³ Ideas and creativity travel with the mind, and as such extend the working day in ways that are not always anticipatory or ideal. The boundaries of the working day and work itself

are reconfigured rendering work omnipresent. This mobility to work is also a part of the autonomy afforded workers that marks production in post-Fordist capitalism, because work is no longer bound to a specific location. In this sense, subjectivity itself is reconfigured, because immaterial labor is intellectual labor, but also because as intellectual labor it can infiltrate dimensions of life previously or otherwise non-work-related. As Jason Read asserts, "For a new mode of production such as capital to be instituted it is not sufficient for it to simply form a new economy, or write new laws, it must institute itself in the quotidian dimensions of existence—it must become habit."⁵⁴ In other words, the advent of immaterial labor also necessitates a shift in how subject's orient themselves to work.

This subject-making power is no more present than in the ideology of "do what you love" that permeates the very cultural industries marked by precarity in the present moment. This sentiment was captured in a *New York Times* article on unpaid internships and the millennial generation, which quotes Breanne Thomas, a young person working several internships: "Success doesn't always mean financial success, but doing something you're passionate about . . . For some people, being an accountant, taking a safe route, is perfectly fine, but it's not where my values lie."⁵⁵ While the mantra itself does not appear in the quote, "do what you love" is the guiding logic behind it. Passion and values precede wages and healthcare for this individual in a route that is decidedly "unsafe." Indeed, in this quote, passion for one's work and a commitment to pursue work that embodies, if not reflects, one's values is exchanged for waged work. In this way, "do what you love, and love what you do," rather than doing what one needs to do to secure adequate wages and healthcare, justifies the precarity that exploits workers in these fields. Discussing the exchange of meaningful work and increasing precarity, Ross asserts, "In return for giving up the tedium of stable employment, there is the thrill of proving yourself by finding out if you have what it takes. Neoliberalism has succeeded wherever its advocates have preached the existential charge of this kind of work ethic, and of the virtues of being liberated from the fetters of company rules, managerial surveillance and formal regularity."⁵⁶ In this way, "do what you love" provides spiritual fulfillment and existential affirmation of the nonmonetary value of one's work *because* one does not do it for wages, or a large salary. This exchange of wages for passion bears implications for all workers because, as Tokumitsu argues, "when *passion* becomes the socially accepted motivation for working, talk of wages or reasonable scheduling becomes crass."⁵⁷ Thus, as an ethos, "do what you love" justifies the very kinds of work arrangements that characterize precarity, such as unwaged or low-waged work and flexibility, in its promise of personal fulfillment.

As Tokumitsu argues, the notion that one can or should merely "do what they love" is perhaps the most insidious and successful of neoliberal mantras because, while affirming some individual's choices to "do what you love," it simultaneously justifies the exploitation of all workers.⁵⁸ While some workers' choices reflect some kind of higher calling, this mantra makes other workers performing undesirable labor for equally, if not worse conditions of exploitation responsible for their very exploitation, because they could always leave to "do what they love." This individualistic ideology is both comforting and placating given the precarity of fields within which it is most touted. As Ross asserts, "The market evangelism of neoliberalism has produced so many converts because it exploits the credo that individuals have some control over their economic destinies."⁵⁹ Under this logic, personal choices rather than capitalist exploitation are to blame for one's lack of a living wage and health benefits, or even resentment at the drudgery of work itself, because one could always choose to pursue what they love rather than what they need. Further, this ideology makes the absence of those very life necessities, such as a living wage and health benefits irrelevant, because the ideological presupposition to do what

one loves not only makes the work itself the prize (i.e., one gets to do the work, which is the reward because one “loves” it), but also broader demands on behalf of labor become shortsighted. Indeed, “loving your work” reduces the possibility for “new forms of labor organization[,] and even justifies wage stagnation and regression” by compelling labor from individuals for very little, if anything at all.⁶⁰ In effect, this emphasis on personal choice operates as what McRobbie describes as a form of self-management: “There is an expectation of pleasure in the work itself, such that it functions as rationale for embarking on an otherwise perilous career . . . What starts as an inner desire for rewarding work is retranslated into a set of techniques for conducting oneself in the uncertain world of creative labor.”⁶¹ In sum, “doing what one loves” provides the mode of governance necessary for precarious capitalism.

Of course, “doing what one loves” rather than what one has to, is only possible for those who can afford to do so. As Tokumitsu observes: “Maybe anyone can do what he or she loves, but only the wealthy can avoid going into debt for it.”⁶² Indeed, given the reality of mass student debt, it seems unlikely that anyone other than those without student debt could pursue the kind of immaterial, unwaged work so often associated with the “do what you love” ethos. The imperative to do what you love amidst the creative economy is especially concerning given that wages for workers between the ages of 25 and 34 with bachelor’s degrees has fallen, while student debt loads have consistently grown. Taken in this context, “do what you love” is an ethos that belies socioeconomic status, rather than passion for one’s work.⁶³ Discussing the precarity of creative work, McRobbie astutely observes that “to some extent middle-class status nowadays rests upon the idea that work is something to which one has a passionate attachment” rather than middle-class wages itself.⁶⁴ One can however only pursue this path if some middle-class comforts are already secured, such as familial wealth, housing, a postsecondary education, healthcare, a relative amount of personal freedom (namely, no children or dependents), and of course little to no debt.

Additionally, and perhaps less recognized, “love,” when used to procure labor, renders this labor less refusable, less serious, and ultimately, less like labor at all. If one truly loves something then the labor is not only the reward, but it is an act of self-actualization. The danger in this neoliberal ideology is the way in which it reconfigures work as something that is not work at all, and in doing so, makes any and all demands on behalf of one’s labor illegitimate. Under this mantra, work is no longer work, it is something one pursues for spiritual and existential fulfillment rather than a wage and health benefits. In this way, “do what you love” works to naturalize exploitation, because “loving” one’s labor renders it non-labor. As Marxist feminists have long argued, the invocation of “love” to extract unwaged, unrecognized labor both undergirds waged labor, and characterizes feminine labor in a capitalist system.⁶⁵ Speaking to the unwaged labor of housework, Silvia Federici asserts, “Capital had to convince us that it is a natural, unavoidable, and even fulfilling activity to make us accept working without a wage.”⁶⁶ Federici’s assertion highlights how by rendering certain kinds of work spiritually or existentially fulfilling, the legitimacy of a wage for this very labor becomes suspect; in other words, framing some labors as “natural” or the object of one’s love and affection works towards its illegitimacy as a waged endeavor. In a similar vein, “do what you love” compels free, or very nearly free, labor from individuals under the guise of love. Examining the figure of the fashion intern in the next section, I argue that the ideology of “do what you love” sustains precarious employment and renders the labor of fashion interns non-work.

As I discuss further below, while an exploited labor class, interns simultaneously possess some amount of social capital that other fashion workers, such as those manufacturing clothes, or even those selling them, do not, an aspect of labor stratification in the industry

that while still exploitative, is vastly distinct in its effects. I assert that examining the fashion intern illustrates the ways in which the feminization of work and “do what you love” collude to disadvantage those most impacted by student indebtedness: Latinas and black women, whose representation—whether in popular media or high profile lawsuits—is largely absent from this labor pool.⁶⁷ The ideology of “do what you love” is most pervasive within industries that possess a high degree of social prestige (such as the culture industries of fashion, film, writing, and music, as well as academia), and less so within professions that perform more materially necessary labor (such as manual and custodial labor, food and retail services, and the health professions), which makes the figure of the fashion intern, whose labor is most often glamorized, an especially apt case for the present study. Examining the figure of the fashion intern below, I argue that the ideology of “do what you love,” in its existential guidance merely calcifies the very structural hierarchies of economic class, race, and sex that its promise implicitly offers to transcend, particularly because it predominates in industries that rely on a large swath of underpaid and unpaid labor. As I outline below, the stratifications among women evident in the AAUW’s research on student debt are reproduced in the composition of fashion interns, a phenomenon I assert is made possible through the imperative to “do what you love” amidst the feminization of work.

Fashion Interns and Free Labor

Fashion is not possible without free labor. As Lauren Sherman, writing on the industry website *Fashionista* states, “If we don’t have unpaid assistants working on set, or in the office, magazines wouldn’t get published, film wouldn’t get developed, and fashion shows wouldn’t run so smoothly.”⁶⁸ These “assistants” Sherman mentions are interns: individuals who fill positions within fashion brands, design houses and fashion magazines, under the guise that they will receive professional tutelage and skills, with the promise of a job upon its completion. However, these promises are rarely fulfilled. As the now more than thirty lawsuits filed since 2010 evidence, intern labor most typically does not lead to a paid position but rather another internship, and the “skills” one acquires during these stints are most often the reproductive labor necessary to maintaining any corporate entity or business: answering phones, relaying messages, maintaining emails, organizing and cleaning the offices, running errands, and other administrative tasks.⁶⁹ However, as Sherman’s quote highlights, despite the crucial function this labor provides, it remains unwaged.

The phenomenon of the fashion intern is part of the broader proliferation of precarious labor forms marked by “instability, the absence of legal contracts (of employment abiding by legal standards), lack of protection and social benefits, [and] lack of collective agreement of employment, and low wages.”⁷⁰ In a 2010 Economic Policy Institute report on the labor of interns, researchers Kathryn Anne Edwards and Alexander Hertel-Fernandez identify the 2008 recession as a turning point in intern labor, as, post-recession, corporations move towards replacing waged-workers with the free, or virtually free, labor of interns.⁷¹ This trend points towards the broader austerity measures enacted in the wake of the 2008 recession. The proliferation of precarious labor forms, such as interns, adjuncts, freelancers, and other independent-contract workers, are a symptom of a larger shift made possible by neoliberal reforms and the dismantling of what little security was attached to labor prior to the 2008 recession.⁷² While no one keeps a precise count of how many paid and/or unpaid internships exist at a given moment, a 2008 National Association of Colleges and Employers report found fifty percent of graduating college students had held internships, a drastic increase when compared to a Northwestern University study that evidenced a mere seventeen percent in 1992.⁷³ As Ross Perlin argues in *Intern Nation: How to Earn Nothing and Learn Little in the Brave*

New Economy, the proliferation of this labor form has effectively become “a mainstream experience after the recession began,” and as Andrew Ross asserts, the very waged and salary positions held out as promises to interns remain “nice work if you can get it.”⁷⁴

While intern labor is utilized across the culture industries, the fashion industry stands as the most iconic. This iconicity is due in large part to the numerous television shows (not to mention films and magazine profiles) of this worker. It is, as Annemarie Strassel observes, a “glamorized form of labor” that remains culturally unrecognizable because of this.⁷⁵ Several reality television shows emerging over the last ten years have specifically centered on the figure of the fashion intern: *Running in Heels* (2009), *Kell on Earth* (2010), *The Rachel Zoe Project* (2008–13), *The Fashionista Diaries* (2007), and *The City* (2008–10), a spin-off of another hit reality television series *The Hills* (2006–10). In all of these productions, a young person (usually a feminine woman but also sometimes a feminine man) travels to a big city in order to “pay their dues” at a leading fashion company. The audience follows their misadventures and mishaps while they struggle to “make it” in the industry. Unclear, however, is what exactly constitutes “making it.” In *The City* for instance, the show’s overarching narrative follows the main character, Whitney Port, concluding her internship with Diane Von Furstenberg with a position at *Elle* magazine, and then selling a clothing line to Bergdorf Goodman via a successful fashion show in Bryant Park during New York City’s notoriously competitive and prohibitively expensive Fashion Week. Not only is this narrative arc implausible for most every other intern, but it elides terribly the ways in which Port’s lifestyle is impossible based on the incomes and work schedules of actual interns. Further, this narrative arc reframes Port’s familial background as irrelevant to her success. Port’s familial wealth and social capital warranted her inclusion in the reality television show *The Hills* (that followed a wealthy, white set of teenagers in Orange County, California), which led to her role in *The City*. *The City*’s portrayal of Port, both documentary realist in its aesthetic and entirely implausible, renders the very factors that guaranteed her success (i.e., familial wealth and social networks that include television producers) irrelevant, and reframes her rise within the fashion industry as fueled by her “love” of fashion.

In contrast to Port’s implausible account is the case of Diana Wang. The case that served as the basis for a 2012 class-action lawsuit, Wang’s story both reproduces and departs from the archetypal narrative presented throughout pop culture:

In August 2011 Xuedan “Diana” Wang began her “dream” position as the “head accessories intern” at the legendary fashion magazine *Harper’s Bazaar* after graduating from Ohio State. Upending her life in Columbus, she moved to New York City only to find herself working as many as fifty-five hours a week without pay. She supervised eight other interns, ran menial errands, and hauled bags of clothes between publicity firms. On some days Wang was unable to eat lunch until 4pm and worked as late as 10pm with no break for dinner. Five months after her internship began, Wang concluded her work as a glorified messenger service for the magazine with no job offer and little professional experience that might help her gain a foothold in the fashion industry. It was her seventh unpaid internship.⁷⁶

Diana’s story is unfortunately not unique. In fact, it is quite similar to another fashion intern’s story, Lauren Ballinger, who in her last semester at the American University of Paris “saved one credit before graduating to use toward an internship at *W*,” a leading U.S. fashion magazine.⁷⁷ “Ms. Ballinger was paid \$12.00 a day to work in *W*’s Accessories Department,” working from eight or nine each morning until eight to ten every night, “packing, organizing, and delivering accessories to editors.”⁷⁸ Further, Ballinger, who took the position as a part of her career training, was not only trained by other interns, and

thus did not receive the insider industry training nor the networking opportunities she was promised, but the *W*editors refused to provide Ballinger with a recommendation upon the completion of her internship, effectively withholding from her her last remaining academic credit.⁷⁹

Wang and Ballinger's stories are not exceptional but are symptomatic of a larger trend in compelling free labor from a largely young pool of educated, ambitious individuals. Overwhelmingly, this labor pool across culture industries is female, with 77 percent of the intern labor workforce woman-identified.⁸⁰ This aspect of the labor pool not only reflects the ways in which cultural representations of the fashion intern compels young women and feminine-leaning persons to pursue it, but also points to how the skills crucial to creative industries, such as flexibility, creativity, and an aesthetic sensibility, is gendered largely feminine, whether a male-identified or female-identified person performs it. Speaking to the topic of feminine labor, Donna Haraway suggests that:

To be feminized is to be made extremely vulnerable; able to be disassembled, reassembled, exploited as reserve labor force; seen less as workers than as servers; subjected to time arrangements on and off the paid job that make a mockery of a limited work day; leading an existence that always borders on the obscene, or out of place.⁸¹

The labor required of interns—free, reproductive in nature, and invisible, with erratic and overly long work hours—is overwhelmingly feminine. As Minh-ha Pham observes, the feminine labor that fashion requires contributes to the perceived triviality of fashion, which works towards its dismissal as an object of study or critique.⁸² I suggest that the gender of fashion is crucial to the perpetuation of the kind of labor exploitation characterized by the fashion intern, because in its triviality, invisibility, and lack of a wage it is rationalized as not 'real' labor and thus not 'real' exploitation, and also because the persons doing it (i.e., young, feminine persons) are culturally expected to "love" this work. In effect, this labor is naturalized in ways that render it non-work.

In addition to gender, the labor of interns reproduces the racial hierarchies evident in the AAUW's research regarding student debt: Latinas and black women are largely absent, both in media representations and high-profile intern lawsuits. This lack of representation points to the ways in which the feminization of work in culture industries works towards the exclusion of the most indebted: Latinas and black women. In this way, the "do what you love" ethos that justifies the precarity exemplary in the figure of the fashion intern also legitimates the racial exclusions of the fashion industry broadly. "Do what you love" is not then merely a means with which to reorient workers to a precarious labor market, but a way to reframe the structural exclusions that reproduce industries like fashion as predominantly white.⁸³ In this way, the unpaid internship—of which the fashion intern is but one—is not only a feminized job, but a racialized one.

To be clear, while most of the intern workers within the fashion industry are either completing degrees (and the internship constitutes a portion of their education) or possess one, not all intern workers are young, idealistic twenty-somethings. For many individuals working as interns, their hopes of obtaining "success" are diluted through a seemingly endless series of internships, effecting what Alex Williams terms "a permanent intern underclass" whose inability to secure waged employment is upheld through programs forever holding out the promise of a job with a paycheck.⁸⁴ Wang's story states that her position at *Harper's* was her seventh, while in another high-profile case (that also lead to a lawsuit), Eric Glatt, who holds a Masters degree in Business Administration in addition to a Bachelor of Arts, was forty-four and had just finished his fourth internship when he began organizing on behalf of interns.⁸⁵ This age difference makes sense when

considering the larger context within which it exists: namely, the dissolution of paid positions within the culture industries and their replacement with unpaid interns. Doing work within the culture industry (whether fashion, film, or music) means doing it for free, or very nearly so. This phenomenon stands in stark contrast to the promises extended by the internship itself: a future with a paycheck. Internships are held out as temporary stopovers on one's way to something bigger and better, when in reality, the internship is a mode of work that is both temporary and short-lived, exemplifying precarious working conditions with little end in sight. This exact reality is captured in the case of Alec Dudson, who after completing several sequential internships, at 29 started *Intern* magazine, a biannual glossy that provides articles, tips, and inspiration for what *The New York Times* tellingly refers to as "the faceless drones who keep the style industries humming."⁸⁶ Dudson's venture is not alone; there is *FindSpark*, a New York jobs network for recent graduates that provides meet-ups and events with themes such as "follow your passion," and "your ideal brand" that "draw hundreds."⁸⁷ There are also several blogs detailing the daily toils of interns in various industries: *Life of an Investment Banking Summer Slave*, *Anonymous Production Assistant* (for interns working within the film and television industries), *Intern-Anonymous* (for all interns), and most relevant to the present study, *Fashion Intern Problems* and *The Devil Pays Nada* (for fashion interns). These cultural phenomena not only point towards the widespread proliferation of this labor form, but also towards its suspended, if not indefinite, nature. For Glatt, who is a founding member of the group Intern Labor Rights, internship labor operates as "an institutionalized form of wage theft."⁸⁸ In this way, many individuals express feeling "trapped" in a cycle that, the longer one is in it seems all the more difficult to leave because one has already put in "dues" towards that elusive future job.

This aspect of their status as workers is exacerbated by the fact that most intern workers are already fearful of speaking up or expressing grievances because of the competitive and tenuous nature of their position. This level of competition is no more apparent than in the world of high fashion, when in 2012, thousands of individuals bid through an online auction for a chance to intern, and specifically, work for free at Chanel, Balenciaga, and Valentino.⁸⁹ It is this level of competition made possible by both the post-recession hiring practices, but also the ideology of doing what one loves, that maintains the pervasive belief that should one leave there is always already someone else willing to fill your space. As Edwards and Hertel-Fernandez outline in their study, "The crucial role of internships in obtaining later employment and the highly competitive market for placement means that no one student has an incentive to report to their employer, even in cases of blatant abuses, since another student will readily work for free."⁹⁰ As one former intern worker, Rachel Watson, stated when discussing her lawsuit against British fashion house Alexander McQueen: "How could I confront my employer at the time when they held all the cards to my future in the industry?"⁹¹ Watson's comment speaks to the way in which the very purpose of the internship—industry affiliation—simultaneously serves as the underlying punitive threat. In other words, by offering one's labor for free in exchange for a promise, one is already at a disadvantage.

This disadvantaged position interns occupy in relation to their employers is structured within the very terms established to prevent their exploitation. Established in 1938, and later strengthened with six guidelines via a 1947 Supreme Court case, the Fair Labor Standards Act (hereafter, FLSA) provides the terms against which the legality of an internship is measured. The guidelines, meant to differentiate between an employee and trainee, do so through the following guidelines: a shared assumption that the labor performed is for vocational and/or educational purposes (and is thus training rather than employment); that the training benefits the trainees; that trainees do not replace regular employees (but work under their supervision); that the employer receive no immediate

advantage from the trainee's activities (and may even experience such training as an impediment); that trainees are not entitled to a job upon completion of the training, and that there is a mutual understanding that trainees are not entitled to wages.²² If all six guidelines are met, then the "employee" is legally considered to be a "trainee," or in this case an intern. However, there are several crucial limits to these guidelines, the first of which concerns the wageless nature of this work. Originally intended to establish guidelines for apprenticeships that were for manual labor and production work, these guidelines cannot and do not account for how the U.S. labor market has changed dramatically, exemplified here in the creative labor necessary to culture industries like fashion.²³ As Edwards and Hertel-Fernandez note, "A serious problem surrounding unpaid interns is [that] they are often not considered employees and therefore are not protected by employment discrimination laws," such as legislation that protects against sexual harassment, and discrimination based on race, age, or physical and/or mental ability.²⁴ This is because the very statutes that are intended to protect employees in the workplace are established on the grounds of a relationship wherein the employer provides the employee with a wage, the very thing that mediates and defines them as such. Further, these guidelines "permit (and even incentivize) the replacement of regular workers with unpaid college students and recent graduates," because it sanctions the employer's practice of compelling free labor from intern workers under the guise of "educational purposes." The supposed "educational purposes" are evident in the mediating body that most often arranges the internships: university programs that possess corporate contracts with the internship offering agencies.²⁵ Indeed, it is difficult to imagine any situation wherein free labor is not to the immediate advantage of an employer (or in this case, the educator). It is this aspect (i.e., the "educational purposes" that render the labor unwaged) of the unpaid positions that fosters their growth, because it is always to the employers' advantage to obtain labor for free, rather than having to invest in a waged worker. This leads to what is perhaps the most glaring problem to the proliferation of this labor: the way in which it limits the participation to students who can afford to work for free, "effectively institutionalizing socioeconomic disparities."²⁶

The normalization of unpaid internships throughout the culture industries means that these industries—like fashion—are increasingly exclusive, reserved for those with familial and/or industry connections, and the means with which to support unpaid work. As noted in a 2012 report conducted by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, internships remain the single most important factor when considering a college graduate for employment.²⁷ However, because student debt is a necessary burden for some students seeking a degree, unpaid internships—and thus some career paths—are not an option. This exclusionary entry to internships has implications regarding the composition of the very culture industries relying on intern labor. As internship servicers such as InternMatch have shown, unpaid internships contribute to the lack of diversity in certain industries.²⁸ Long criticized for its exclusionary nature, fashion has most recently endured numerous public condemnations concerning structural racism. Considering the industry's reliance on unpaid internships, it is perhaps unsurprising to find that women of color, most prominently Latinas and black women, experience difficulty succeeding in, or gaining entry into the fashion world.²⁹ Additionally, when considering the ethos of "do what you love," it seems that very few, and perhaps more importantly, very few women of color, are actually able to do so.






What the fashion intern points to then is how the immaterial, precarious labor of the culture industries manifests in highly gendered, racialized ways. Represented as a glamorous lifestyle, the fashion intern typically does not earn wages, nor does she (and she is typically a "she") obtain the waged position she was promised. The fashion intern's labor (like other precarious workers of the culture industries) is feminine in that it remains

unwaged and highly flexible, yet performs a socially reproductive function. Indeed, her unwaged labor is crucial to fashion's production. Similarly, when examined in the context of mass debt, the fashion intern is not merely a feminized job but a racialized one, meaning that it perpetuates the whiteness of the fashion industry through its exclusivity (i.e., being able to perform demanding work without a wage). Further, like other precarious labor forms, the fashion intern's labor is compelled and naturalized through the ideology of "do what you love"; because it is work that one "loves," one should perform it for free, and because one "loves" it (and is willing to perform it for free), it is not work but rather an extension of one's highest self. In sum, examining the fashion intern illustrates how the feminization of work and the ethos of "do what you love" collude to disadvantage those most negatively impacted by student debt—Latinas and black women—and also perpetuates the whiteness of the fashion industry itself.

Conclusion

Examining the figure of the fashion intern, I have outlined how the labor of interns performs work crucial to fashion's production, yet remains largely unwaged. I situate the fashion intern within a broader field of precarious workers, whose labor has been made unstable through the absence of legal contracts and the lack of protection and social benefits, collective agreement of employment, and low wages (if any wages at all). I have argued that a crucial part of the proliferation of precarious labor forms is the ideology of "do what you love," that compels low-wage, or entirely unwaged labor from individuals through the rhetoric of "love." Through this ideology, labor is rendered less refusable, less serious, and ultimately, less like labor at all; because it is work that one "loves," one should perform it for free, and because one "loves" it (and is willing to perform it for free), it is not work but rather an extension of one's highest self. This ideology is most pervasive in the very industries marked by precarity, such as the fashion industry, and thus bears influence on who can participate in them. In other words, if the labor necessary to the culture industries is unwaged (especially the entry-level positions like internships), then the industry is structurally foreclosed to those who cannot afford to work for free. As the AAUW research suggests, persons who cannot afford to work for free are most typically Latinas and black women, and indeed, their absence is evident in representations of the fashion intern, whether in popular media or high-profile lawsuits. In this way, the ideology of "do what you love," calcifies the very structural hierarchies of economic class, race, and sex that its promise implicitly offers to transcend. Taken in the context of mass student debt, "do what you love," as an ideology that sustains precarious employment in the culture industries, bears relevance for what these industries look like. If unwaged work is the requirement for entry, then certainly those able to do so will comprise the bulk of its workers.


















Notes

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2. "Pay Gap Especially Harmful for Black and Hispanic Women Struggling with Student Debt," *AAUW: Economic Justice*, accessed February 8, 2017, aauw.com. 
3. "Pay Gap." 
4. "Pay Gap." 
5. "Pay Gap." 
6. Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man: An Essay on Neoliberalism*, trans. Joshua David Jordan (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e) Intervention Press, 2012); Andrew Ross, *Creditocracy and the Case for Debt Refusal* (New York: OR Books, 2013); Andrew Ross, "Anti-Social Debts," *Contexts* 111, no. 4 (Fall 2012): 28–32;

Andrew Ross, "Mortgaging the Future: Student Debt in the Age of Austerity," *New Labor Forum* 22, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 22–28; Andrew Ross, "The Politics of Debt Resistance," *New Labor Forum* 22, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 12–15. [↗](#)

7. Andrew Ross, *Nice Work If You Can Get It: Life and Labor in Precarious Times* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2005); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). [↗](#)
8. Angela McRobbie, "Reflections on Feminism, Immaterial Labour, and the Post-Fordist Regime," *New Formations* 70, no. 70 (2010): 60–76; 66. [↗](#)
9. McRobbie, "Reflections" 67. [↗](#)
10. Kylie Jarret, *Feminism, Labour, and Digital Media* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2015), 18. [↗](#)
11. See Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild, eds., *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (New York: Holt Paperback, 2002); and Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). [↗](#)
12. Christina Morini, "The Feminisation of Labor in Cognitive Capitalism," *Feminist Review*, no. 87 (2007): 40–59; 4. [↗](#)
13. "Pay Gap" [↗](#)
14. Minh-Ha Pham, *Asians Wear Clothes on the Internet: Race, Gender, and the Work of Personal Style Blogging* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 190. [↗](#)
15. Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Cleaning Up/Kept Down: A Historical Perspective on Racial Inequality in 'Women's Work,'" *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1999): 1349–41; Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor," *Signs* 18, no. 1 (Autumn 1992): 6–8. [↗](#)
16. Ehrenreich and Hochschild, eds., *Global Woman*; Glenn, "Cleaning Up/Kept Down"; Glenn, "From Servitude to Service Work." [↗](#)
17. "'You've Got to Find What You Love' Jobs Says," *Stanford News*, June 14, 2005. [↗](#)
18. Miya Tokumitsu, "In the Name of Love," *Jacobin Magazine*, January 12, 2014. [↗](#)
19. Sonia Alvarez Leguizamon et al., eds. "Precarious Labor," *Poverty: An International Glossary* (London: Zed Books, 2007). [↗](#)
20. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, "The Role of Higher Education in Career Development: Employer Perceptions," December 2012. [↗](#)
21. Pham, *Asians Wear Clothes*, 176. [↗](#)
22. Kevin Miller et al., *Deeper in Debt: Women and Student Loans*, The American Association of University Women, May 2017, 1. [↗](#)
23. Miller et al., *Deeper in Debt*, 2. [↗](#)
24. Miller et al., *Deeper in Debt*, 2. [↗](#)
25. Miller et al., *Deeper in Debt*, 2. [↗](#)
26. Miller et al., *Deeper in Debt*, 2. [↗](#)
27. Miller et al., *Deeper in Debt*, 19. [↗](#)
28. Miller et al., *Deeper in Debt*, 20. [↗](#)
29. Miller et al., *Deeper in Debt*, 20. [↗](#)
30. Miller et al., *Deeper in Debt*, 2. [↗](#)
31. Miller et al., *Deeper in Debt*, 20. [↗](#)

32. Miller et al., *Deeper in Debt*, 20. [↗](#)
33. Miller et al., *Deeper in Debt*, 20. [↗](#)
34. Miller et al., *Deeper in Debt*, 20. [↗](#)
35. Miller et al., *Deeper in Debt*, 32. [↗](#)
36. Lazzarato, *Indebted Man*, 7–8. [↗](#)
37. Ross, “Anti-Social,” 29. [↗](#)
38. Miller, *Deeper in Debt*, 20–23. [↗](#)
39. Lazzarato, *Indebted Man*, 29–38. [↗](#)
40. Lazzarato, *Indebted Man*, 38. [↗](#)
41. Ross, “Anti-Social Debts,” 31. [↗](#)
42. Miller, *Deeper in Debt*, 30. [↗](#)
43. I am referring to employment in the professional trades, and the knowledge economy generally, that requires baccalaureate education. As Ross argues, “it is impossible to ignore that workforce entrants, especially the college educated, have to take on large debt burdens simply to prepare themselves for employability. An increasingly larger share of wages is going to servicing the debts incurred to meet the basic mental and physical requirements demanded for modern work.” See Ross, “Mortgaging the Future,” 23. [↗](#)
44. Lazzarato, *Indebted Man*, 9. [↗](#)
45. Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor”; Virno and Hardy, *Radical Thought in Italy*; and Michael Hardt, “Affective Labor,” *Boundary*, 26, no. 2 (1999): 89–100. [↗](#)
46. Lazzarato, “Immaterial,” 135. [↗](#)
47. Lazzarato, “Immaterial,” 135. [↗](#)
48. Andrew Ross, “The New Geography of Work: Power to the Precarious?,” *Theory, Culture & Society*, 25, no. 7–8 (Dec. 2008): 35. [↗](#)
49. Ross, “The New Geography,” 35. [↗](#)
50. Ross, “The New Geography,” 31. [↗](#)
51. Lazzarato, “Immaterial,” 131. [↗](#)
52. Lazzarato, “Immaterial,” 131. [↗](#)
53. Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 111–12. [↗](#)
54. Jason Read, *The Micro-Politics of Capital: Marx and the Pre-History of the Present* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 36. [↗](#)
55. Alex Williams, “For Interns, All Work and No Payoff—Millennials Feel Trapped,” *The New York Times*, February 14, 2014, www.nytimes.com/2014/02/06/fashion/millennials-internships.html. [↗](#)
56. Ross, “the New Geography,” 36. [↗](#)
57. Miya Tokumitsu, *Do What You Love and Other Lies About Success and Happiness* (New York: Regan Arts, 2015), 7. [↗](#)
58. Tokumitsu, *Do What You Love*, 2015. [↗](#)
59. Ross, “The New Geography,” 38. [↗](#)
60. Angela McRobbie, *Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Cultural Industries* (New Jersey: Wiley, 2016), 26. [↗](#)
61. Angela McRobbie, *British Fashion Design: Rag Trade or Image Industry?* (London: Routledge, 1998), 52. [↗](#)
62. Tokumitsu, *Do What You Love*, 19. [↗](#)
63. Chris Maisano, “The Soul of Student Debt,” *Jacobin* 9 (2012), cited in Tokumitsu, *Do What You Love*, 20. [↗](#)

64. McRobbie, *Be Creative*, 48. 
65. I am referencing the Wages for Housework Campaign and the writings of some of its prominent members: Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community* (New York: Butler and Tanner Ltd., 1972); Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (New York: PM Press, 2012); Leopoldina Fortunati, "Immaterial Labor and its Machinization," *Ephemera*, 7, no. 1 (2007): 139–57. 
66. Federici, *Revolution*, 16. 
67. No demographic data regarding the racial composition of fashion interns currently exists. In this paper I examine news articles, high-profile lawsuits, and popular media representations. In my archive of cultural material, only one media representation, the 2007 SOAP network show *The Fashionista Diaries*, portrays the labor of non-white and/or non-Asian-American fashion interns. 
68. Lauren Sherman, "Will Prohibiting Unpaid Internships Kill the Fashion Industry?," *Fashionista.com*, April 8, 2010, www.fashionista.com/2010/04/will-prohibiting-unpaid-internships-kill-the-fashion-industry. 
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